



1. An absorbent article comprising

a liquid absorbent layer, the absorbent article having a skin surface and a garment surface;

a pair of compressed grooves, where the liquid absorbent layer is compressed and recessed from a side of the skin surface toward the garment surface, being provided to extend in a longitudinal direction of the article, the compressed grooves being located laterally apart from a longitudinal centerline of the article, each one of the pair of grooves being located on a single side of the longitudinal centerline, the pair of grooves each curving inwardly within a range of an equal distance forward and rearward from a lateral reference line in the longitudinal direction such that a separation distance between the compressed grooves is smallest at a point within the range, the pair of grooves being substantially parallel to each other over distances forward and rearward of the range; and

a rear flexible portion, where the liquid absorbent layer is recessed from the side of the garment surface toward the skin surface, being provided to extend toward a rear end edge of the article from a starting point that is located closer to the rear end edge than the lateral reference line, at least a portion of the rear flexible portion being located on the longitudinal centerline and between the substantially parallel compressed grooves.

(Emphasis added).

Applicants' amended independent claim 1 claims an absorbent article having an absorbent article with a skin surface and a garment surface. The article includes a pair of compressed grooves produced by compressing and recessing the absorbent layer from the skin surface toward the garment surface of the absorbent article. The grooves are each laterally spaced away from and on a single side of a longitudinal centerline of the article. Within a range of equal distance forward and rearward from a lateral reference line of the article, each of the pair of grooves curves inwardly such that a separation distance between the grooves is smallest at a point along the longitudinal centerline and within the range. At distances extending forward and rearward from the range, the grooves are substantially parallel.

The article further includes a rear flexible portion, which is produced by recessing the absorbent layer from the garment surface toward the skin surface. The rear flexible portion is provided at least in part along the longitudinal centerline and between the substantially parallel compressed grooves, and has a starting point that begins at a point between the lateral reference line and a rear edge of the article.

Brisebois discloses a sanitary napkin 20 including and absorbent layer 44, 48 having a skin side and a garment side (see, e.g., Col. 3: 14 - 20 of Brisebois). The absorbent layer 48 further includes bending zones 102, 104, 700 extending longitudinally over the absorbent layer 48 (see, e.g., Col. 11: 51 - 61 and FIGs. 7, 8 of Brisebois). Bending zone 700 extends along a longitudinal axis of the absorbent layer 48, and bending zones 102, 104 are each located on a single side of the longitudinal centerline.

In sharp contrast to Applicants' invention as claimed in amended independent claim 1, Brisebois does not disclose or otherwise suggest Applicants' range comprising an equal distance forward and rearward from a lateral reference line, within which compressed grooves (bending zones 102, 104) curve inwardly such that a separation distance between the compressed grooves is smallest at a point within the range. Rather, Brisebois suggests that the bending zones 102, 104, 700 extend linearly either along or laterally from a longitudinal centerline of the sanitary napkin in order to enable the napkin to be folded into a "three-dimensional deformation profile" that resembles either an "M" or a "W" (see, e.g., Col. 11: 36 - 40 of Brisebois).

In addition, unlike Applicants' invention as claimed in amended independent claim 1, Brisebois fails to teach or otherwise suggest that the bending zone 700 extends rearward from a starting point between the lateral reference line and the rear edge of the napkin. Rather, Brisebois

suggests that bending zone 700 “extends the full length of the ... absorbent layer” (see, e.g., Col. 11: 58, 59 of Brisebois).

The sanitary napkin of Brisebois provides an “M” or “W” profile on deformation in order to improve the comfort of the wearer and reduce bunching (see, e.g., abstract of Brisebois).

Applicants developed their claimed napkin for a distinctly different purpose:

When a pressure acts on the compressed grooves from the thighs, since the rear flexible portion does not overlap with the lateral reference line that is intended to face the vaginal opening of a wearer, the absorbent article can be pressed against the wearer's vaginal opening without being sharply bent at its portion intended to face the vaginal opening. In its rear portion, on the other hand, since at least a portion of the rear flexible portion is located between the compressed grooves, the portion having the rear flexible portion can be bent to fit into the cleft of the buttocks by the pressure acting on the compressed grooves from the thighs. Accordingly, even if a relatively loose undergarment is worn, the absorbent article can be brought into close contact not only with the vaginal opening but also with the cleft of the buttocks by the pressure from the thighs.

(Page 6, lines 9 -22 of Applicants' specification, emphasis added).

Clearly, the bending zones 102, 104, 700 as configured by Brisebois do not operate to cause a portion of the sanitary napkin of Brisebois near the lateral reference line to press against the vaginal opening of a wearer without bending while causing a rear flexible portion to be bent to be fit into the cleft of the buttocks.

For at least the above-argued reasons, Applicants respectfully submit that amended independent claim 1 is neither anticipated nor made obvious by Brisebois, and stands in condition for allowance. As claims 2 - 6 depend from allowable independent claim 1, Applicants further submit that dependent claims 2 - 6 are also allowable for at least this reason.

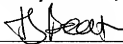
Therefore, Applicants respectfully request that the rejections of claims 1 - 6 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) be withdrawn.

**CONCLUSION**

In view of the above amendments and remarks, Applicant believes the pending application is in condition for allowance. If there are any remaining issues which the Examiner believes could be resolved through either a Supplemental Response or an Examiner's Amendment, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number indicated below.

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Respectfully submitted,

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